

Commuting methods hailed: Local firms win commute kudos

By Peter Reuell

Ask folks in MetroWest about the worst part of their day, and you'll probably get an earful about frustratingly long, traffic-clogged commutes.

Unless those folks happen to work at Intel Corp. in Hudson, Hopkinton-based EMC Corp. or Novell Inc.'s Waltham location.

The three companies, along with nearly four dozen other employers in the Boston area, were recognized this week for their efforts to promote carpooling and other commuting methods as some of the best places for New England commuters to work.

Sponsored by the federal Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Transportation, the program, called the Best Workplaces for Commuters, is designed to both highlight employers who make the list and give other companies a model to follow.

"The program basically spotlights these companies," said Lucy Edmondson, the campaign's regional coordinator at EPA New England. "They find it an attractive way to attract and retain good employees."

To qualify for the list, companies must provide a primary commuting benefit, like monthly transit pass subsidies or telecommuting, and at least three supporting benefits, like carpool incentives, lockers and showers for employees who walk or bike to work, or on-site amenities like day care or dry cleaning.

But the program is about more than just bragging rights.

If more employers support alternative commutes, she said, the payoff is a cleaner environment, happier employees and improved quality of life.

"We have a goal of making commuter benefits as standard an offering as a 401(k)," Edmondson said. "The benefits

these companies offer are a great way to reduce air pollution and a great way to reduce traffic congestion."

For employees at companies like Intel in Hudson, it's also a great way to score a prime parking space.

Started in 2001, the company's carpool program now boasts more than 250 members, or more than 10 percent of the 2,300 employees at the Hudson location.

"It's really part of the culture here," Patrick Ward, a local Intel spokesman, said yesterday. "People are aware of the program and aware of the advantages of taking part in it."

The company also outfits most employees with laptop computers, allowing many to work from home.

At EMC in Hopkinton, the commitment goes even further.

In addition to encouraging carpooling with preferred parking, the company provides employees with shuttle buses to reduce the need to drive between buildings, and even offers electric cars to a handful of employees who carpool.

At Novell in Waltham, up to 20 percent of the company's employees tele-commute on a regular basis, company spokesman Hal Thayer said.

Along with shuttles to and from area train stations and on site bike parking, showers and lockers, and there's plenty of reasons for employees to leave their cars at home.

"Encouraging smart commuting is the right thing for our employees and for our community," Thayer said yesterday. "Novell works to be a high performance culture, and enabling our employees to work and get to work in a way that makes them the most productive is to our advantage, and to their advantage."